

Summer dances across the prairies and ponds like a swallowtail, gently touching down, but never pausing to rest for long. Laughter and excitement blend with birdsong as visitors explore and experience what nature has to share. An amazing array of mushrooms continues to enchant, with every shape, texture and hue imaginable. Delicacies appear at every turn!

Ahhh...the berries...raspberries, gooseberries, blackberries, mulberries, elderberries, wild strawberries...invite us to sample the sweet taste of summer.

Ponds teem with tadpoles, side swimmers and water scorpions, while dragonflies keep sentry duty overhead. Tracks along the water's edge provide evidence of other animals and await identification.

The forest is filled with sound. Birds, fairly easily spotted in the spring are now concealed by lush foliage and must be located by careful listening. The prairie is spectacular, big bluestem six feet tall and reaching skyward. A pallet of purple and yellow coneflowers, bergamot, black-eyed-Susans and butterfly milkweed dazzles the eye. Closer inspection reveals the insect world within, where each has a specialized shape, color and structure perfectly suited to its niche.

Visitors venture into the wild places to investigate. Preschoolers delight in the world beneath a decaying log. Teenagers take aim with bow and arrow and practice precision casting. Folks from as far away as Ukraine and Japan come to learn about Iowa's natural resources, leaving us with the realization that there are more similarities than differences between places and people.

Summer takes the promises of spring and brings them into full bloom. Hear the deep, throaty call of the bullfrogs near the edge of the pond...and the SPLASH as they dive to underwater safety when an intruder gets too near. Feel the hot sun on your shoulders as you paddle the kayak to the far shore of the lake and the refreshing drips of water that trickle along the shaft of the paddle and down your arm. Taste the sweetness of summer, in the berries and the laughter and the moments of unexpected discovery.

